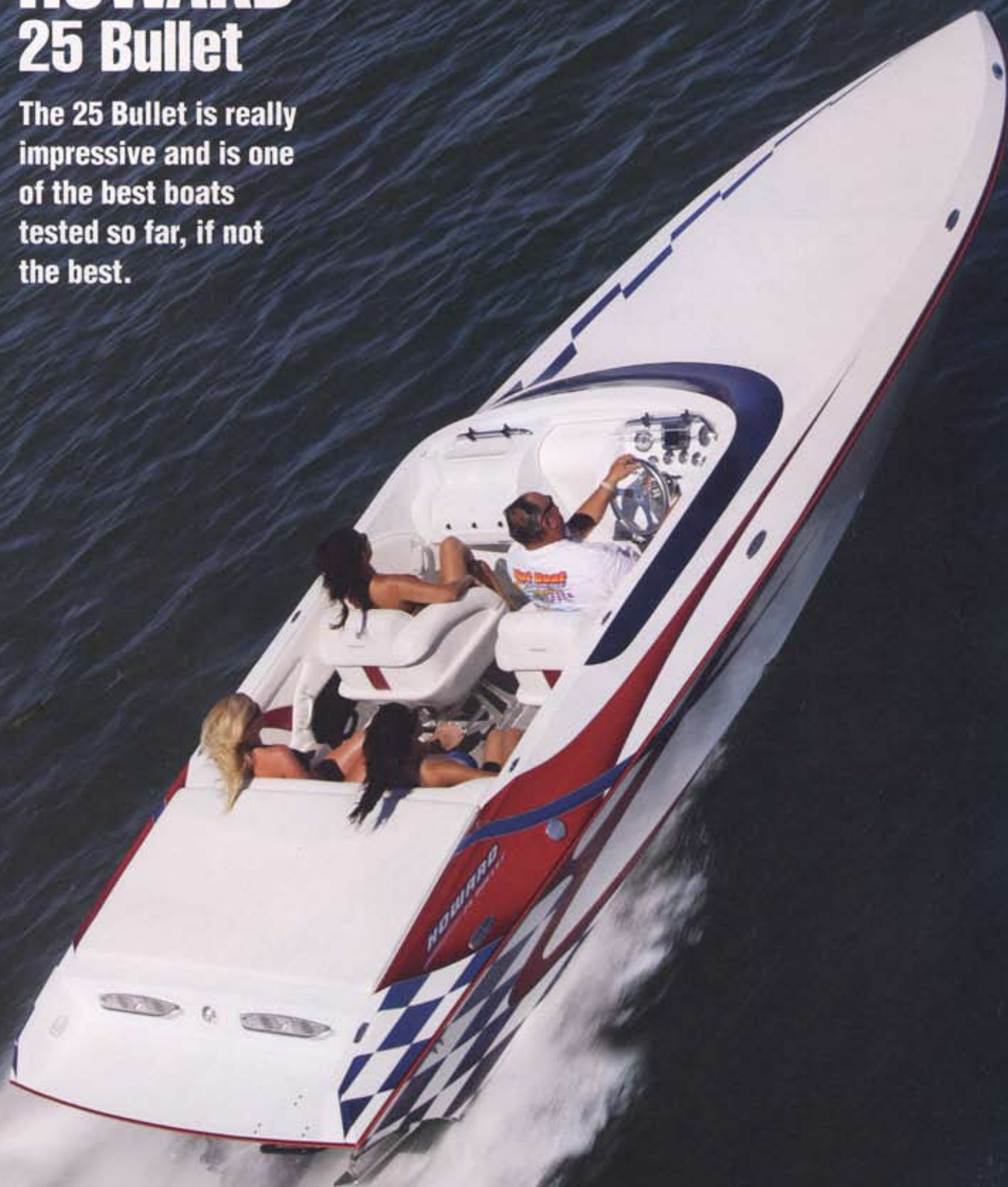


HOWARD 25 Bullet

The 25 Bullet is really impressive and is one of the best boats tested so far, if not the best.





Never let it be said that Howard Custom Boats has forgotten the small-boat buyer. The company still builds a 19' jetboat and several 21' and 22' cruisers. When the company made the jump to build a larger vee-bottom boat, the 28' Bullet project, it wasn't long before the 25 Bullet filled the gap between it and the smaller craft. Michael Willen literally chopped up a perfectly good 28 Bullet into sections in order to create a scaled-down version of the venerable vee-bottom hull. Upon its release in 2003, the new Bullet had no trouble fitting into the hotly contested 25-foot marketplace.

The shortened Bullet features the same proven step vee-bottom, the same racy good looks and a plethora of standard features. Our test boat was the benefactor of a buyer who maxed out the options list, designing a 25 Bullet that is fit for pleasure on several different playgrounds.

The Hull

She's built to last, that's for sure. The list of options begins at the core of the boat, literally, because the owner of this boat dropped an extra \$2,500 to have the deck and bottom of the boat backed with a full balsa core. The hull is wrapped in Knytex multidirectional fiberglass and hand laminated with pure vinylester resin. The hull features a one-piece inner liner for the cockpit and engine compartment. The only other mold used during construction is for the fiberglass engine hatch. Howard allows the hull to cure

inside of the mold for two full weeks to ensure the hull is as straight and strong as possible. This extra effort and lead time isn't wasted either. Our team found the fiberglass perfectly straight and the gelcoat laid out beautifully.

The bottom design is an interesting one. From the step to the transom, the hull progressively changes the amount of deadrise. The bow features a sharp 60-degree entry and at the step it's diminished slightly to 34 degrees. By the time you pass the four lifting strakes and approach the transom, the bottom has flattened to an aggressive 22.5-degrees of deadrise. The transom is also notched and a pair of reverse angled chines is present.

Our test boat was treated to a full compliment of powder-coated aluminum hardware built by Dana Marine. We especially liked the tasteful twist Howard put on traditional checkered-flag graphics. The stretched checkers really livened up the deck of the boat and gave it a racecar flavor.

The Interior

Land and Water of Santa Ana, California, did an amazing job on the interior of our test boat. The company laid R&R Textile marine-grade Berber carpeting throughout the boat and covered the interior in a very soft faux-leather material. The cockpit held room for six adults and was tastefully appointed. Behind the locking cabin door (\$950), the Howard offered a luxurious area for lounging and resting. A custom-designed Sony audio ►



specifications



Test conditions: Rough

Centerline: 25'4"

Beam: 96"

Bottom: Step vee

Drivetrain: MerCruiser HP 525/Bravo XR

HP@prop: 525 horsepower

Overall weight: 4,000 pounds

Base price: \$72,995

Standard features: 100% hand-laminated fiberglass construction with Baltek foam reinforcement, bi- and tri-directional fiberglass, pure vinyl ester resin, full-length stringers, marine-grade plywood, seven-color custom gelcoat, stainless-steel hardware and fasteners, heavy-duty marine battery with battery box, illuminated rocker switches, anodized fuel fills, ski tow, gauge bezels, grab handles with vents, bilge pump, bilge blower, international navigation lights, interior lights, Dino steering wheel, full Livorsi instrumentation, Livorsi dual lever hand controls, power steering, power trim, Bravo One stainless-steel propeller, bow and stern cleats, electric hatch lift, built-in storage compartments, fully appointed cabin with porta-potty, custom color-coordinated genuine naugahyde interiors with plush 40-oz. marine-grade carpet, vinyl rubrail, 6.2 liter MPI MerCruiser (I/O Models)

Options on test boat: Upgrade to 525 HP (\$22,505), full Imco hydraulic steering (\$5,600), dual batteries with Perko switch (\$400), custom billet seat bases by Dana (\$1,400), Dana power sundeck hinges (\$1,400), sliding cabin door (\$950), Dana HP900 trim tabs (\$2,200), Bluewater drive/trim tab indicator (\$650), balsa-cored hull (\$2,500), Garmin in-dash GPS color chart plotter (\$1,400), custom Sony 800-watt audio system (\$2,200), GPS speedometer (\$400), MerCruiser Smartcraft SC1000 on-board computer (\$400)

Price as tested: \$115,000

Top speed, radar: 85.2 mph

Mfg. est speed: 83 mph

0-30 mph: 11.19 seconds

0-40 mph: 13.36 seconds

0-50 mph: 15.42 seconds

0-60 mph: 18.01 seconds

Speed @ 3,000 rpm: 41.9 mph

Speed @ 4,000 rpm: 59.5 mph

Howard Custom Boats
28113 Stanford Ave.
Valencia, CA 91355
(661) 257-9275
howardboats.com

Wow! What an impressive ride. The first thing we noticed was how smooth and soft the ride is. It really feels like you're on a cushion of air. It feels like you're riding on a marshmallow.

system boasted 800-watts of musical power and hit hard through speakers positioned throughout the cabin and cockpit.

A sizable portion of the optional equipment was slated to increase driver comfort. The tilt helm controlled a full hydraulic steering system from Imco (\$5,600). The dash received Bluewater trim tab and drive-position indicators (\$650). To keep the Bullet heading directly for its intended target, Howard installed a Garmin color GPS chart plotter (\$1,400). The electronic wizardry doesn't end there either. Livorsi's accurate GPS speedometer shares dash space with a MerCruiser Smartcraft SC1000 on-board computer system too.

You can't help but feel confident or at least classy when planted in one of the cushioned front bolsters. After all, they are perched atop powdercoated aluminum mounts that Dana Marine designed specifically for the Bullet.

Driving impressions

This incarnation of the 25 Bullet isn't cheap. Its price tag touches \$115,000, which is pretty steep for a midsized boat. We imagine, though, that anyone who gets even a short amount of seat time in this boat is going to immediately see and feel where all of that cash is going. This boat is as graceful as it is classy. The installation of the MerCruiser HP525 engine and Bravo XR drive was top shelf and looked fantastic in its polished surroundings. The engine hatch even pivoted on Dana billet hinges (\$1,400).

A perfect match was reached between the drive and the lab-finished, 28-pitch, four-blade, Bravo 1 propeller. The matchup made it possible to holeshot the boat and drag race it right up to the redline with minimal slippage. This bullet did everything correctly and never faltered during

our performance test. You can't ask much more from a 4,000-pound boat that runs 85.2 mph with stock MerCruiser HP power.

Driver Buzz

Driver 1: "As far as I can tell it's flawless. I don't know what you could do that would improve it. You can go full throttle from a dead stop and it gets on plane very quickly. It's got a little bit of bowrise but once it breaks over the top, it's a rocket from there on out. It's got a wide trim range and once it takes a set it just screams along. It's got a perfect ride. There's no wobble, no side-to-side motion, no porpoise, no nothing. It's a smooth ride and turns great too. I can't say enough good things about how the Howard runs. It's got Dana tabs but you don't even need them. We ran the boat with the tabs all the way up. My only gripe is that the trim indicator gauge isn't mounted in your direct line of sight. I really couldn't find any other flaws in this boat."

Driver 2: "Wow! What an impressive ride. The first thing we noticed was how smooth and soft the ride is. It really feels like you're on a cushion of air. It feels like you're riding on a marshmallow. There's no bone-jarring input from the bottom of the boat. It's a very comfortable boat to drive at slow speeds and it doesn't blow the prop out during low-speed maneuvers. The midrange is outstanding. It really carries itself well at 45-50 mph. The boat really excels at high-speed controllability. It requires very minimal driver input to correct for wind gusts or side wakes. Once you get the boat aired out and you think you're doing good, you touch the trim and it's like it shifts gears. It is really impressive. This boat would get you across a lot of rough water. This is one of the best boats I've tested so far, if not the best." ■